

The invention relates to a soccer skill building game and apparatus (10) therefore. The apparatus includes a playing divider (16), strips (11, 20) for delineating discrete playing regions (12, 14) on either side of the divider. The object of the game is for teams of players one on each side of the divider to keep one ball in play with the feet, the ball being allowed no more than a predetermined maximum number of ground contacts before passing the ball across the divider. Scores are obtained by a failure to return the ball by the opponent.

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SOCCKER SKILL BUILDER

The present invention relates to a skill builder for the game of soccer and also to an apparatus for use in skill building, particularly with the emphasis on junior development.

- 5 The game of soccer is increasingly popular throughout the world and is played widely by young people inside and outside of schools. The success of national soccer teams in International competitions in recent years is often a source of national pride. Further, the game of soccer is also played as a commercial venture, and many professional players, teams and other
- 1 0 members of professional organisations regard soccer as their livelihood.

- Professional players might expect to reap substantial financial rewards resulting from the exercise of their skills and abilities in professional leagues either in Australia or in the more lucrative overseas leagues, for example those in Europe. It is therefore clear that soccer can be regarded not only as a
- 1 5 game or pastime but also as a field of economic endeavour.

As the rewards accumulating to any player are a reflection of the skill and ability of that player it follows that an increase in the skills of the player would lead to increased commercial competitiveness of the player and increased financial rewards.

- 2 0 Improved skills are also desired by those playing a game merely as a recreational pursuit, and a greater ability to play a game usually leads to a greater enjoyment of the game.

- Thus amongst those skills required by any soccer player of note is included the ability to receive a ball passed from another player on the same team, to
- 2 5 intercept a ball passed by a player of the opposing team or to control the ball in play and to dispatch it to its subsequent location very quickly and accurately.

- As with many skills, practise makes perfect, or at least produces an improvement in performance. To this end, soccer players would frequently
- 3 0 practise the passing and receiving of balls, and "ball skills" in general.

In the normal course of a game, or during training, such practise will happen and a subsequent increase in skill of the player could be expected. It is also possible for a player to concentrate more narrowly on these skills by paying particular attention to them during training. However, to a player used to a competitive environment the relatively monotonous nature of narrowly directive training can be perceived as dull and uninteresting and it is all too easy for such training to be abandoned. Moreover, in a controlled training environment it is difficult to simulate the speed and variability of a genuine match. Thus, while practise and training are possible they are not always an attractive option to a player and may not be effective in reproducing the type of play which can occur.

It is to this situation that the present invention is directed. It is an object of the present invention to provide a skill building game offering the opportunity to practise and train certain skills related to the game of soccer in a competitive and enjoyable environment.

Therefore, according to one form of the invention, although this need not be the broadest nor indeed the only form of the invention, there is provided a soccer skill building game to be played by a plurality of players or teams of players, the game comprising;

- 20 - a playing area having delineated thereon a divider marking playing or halves areas for opposing players, or teams, each player or team being restricted to a respective playing half;
- each playing half having a respective service area and a respective general play area, whereby in play a soccer ball is served from the service area to the playing area of the opposing player or team, the players being required to maintain the ball in play by successive passes across the divider, with no more than a predetermined minimum number of ball to the ground contacts being allowed.

By playing in such a manner, players can fortuitously obtain score when the ball of the opposing team fails to reach the playing area or has too many ground contacts, or if the opposing player fails to return the ball.

The game can also be played with a number of features incorporated into

traditional soccer games. Thus it will be possible for the game to include appropriate actions for such infringements as "handball" that is contact between a player's hand and the ball. Typically these actions would be in the form of traditional yellow and red cards indicating respectively "caution" and "sending off". As with the existing soccer game the player would only be sent off for particularly heinous infringements such as, ungentlemanly conduct, and questioning of umpires' decisions to the extent of arguing with the umpire

As a first further aspect of the skill building game, it would be preferable that the team or players on one side of the divider would be allowed up to a predetermined maximum number of passes between the players before the ball must be passed across the divider to the opposing team. Thus, the players are encouraged to develop the skill of passing the ball between themselves.

By introducing a restricting number of allowed ground contacts and the maximum number of passage between players on the same side, the game is adapted to variable skill levels and encourages the building of skills relating to controlling the ball.

According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a game playing apparatus, the apparatus comprising

- 2 0 - a plurality of strip materials arrangeable into a playing area having discrete regions, each region being delineated by one or more strips;
- means for removably attaching the strips to a playing surface, and a playing divider having means for supporting the divider in an upright position.

Preferably, the divider is supported by a pair of aligned posts, in one form of the invention the posts having a spike arrangement for securing them into the ground.

Advantageously, the divider can be used to carry advertisements or company sponsorship.

The present invention will now be described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying illustrations in which:

FIG 1 illustrates an apparatus set up for use in playing the game of the present invention;

FIG 2 illustrates detail of the divider of the apparatus of FIG 1;

FIG 3 illustrates detail of the fixing mechanism for the apparatus of FIG 1;
5 and

FIG 4 illustrates an alternative fixing mechanism.

Shown in the drawings is an apparatus 10 comprising a plurality of outer strips 11 arranged into a playing area, the playing area having a number of discrete regions, each region being delineated by a strip or strips. In
10 particular, the playing area is divided into two general regions 12 and 14 by a divider 16 in the form of a net divided by upright opposing posts 18. The two playing areas 12 and 14 each comprising a general play area designated 12A and 14A respectively and a service area designated 12B and 14B respectively.

15 As can be seen the surface areas 12B, 14B are located at the rear of each of the general playing areas and are considerably smaller in size than the general play areas 12A and 14A. There is also a central divider 20 extending the full length of the playing surface, and extending generally transversely to the divider 16. The regions of the playing area are generally delineated by
20 strips 11 formed, typically of a canvas material impregnated with a hard wearing plastics, for example polyester or polypropylene. Alternatively, the material may be entirely woven or entirely plastics material.

The strips 11 and 20 are secured into the ground at a number of strategic positions by means of eyelets 22 formed in the strips 11, grommets 24 being
25 used to secure the eyelets and pegs 26 passing through the grommets 24, eyelets 22 and into the playing ground. A typical securing arrangement is illustrated in expanded form in FIG 3. At their upper ends the pegs 26 terminate in a disc shaped head 27 which secures the strip 11 on the ground. The head 27 having a hinged handle 29 fitted into a recess formed in the
30 head 27. The handle 29 may be raised to remove the peg 26 and during play the handle 29 rests flush with the upper surface of the head 27.

The divider 16 is shown in greater detail in FIG 2. In this case the supporting posts 18 each comprise a spike 28 adapted for insertion into the ground, and a flange 30 located at one end of the spike 28. Extending upwardly from the flange 30 is a stud member 32. The posts 18 comprise a hollow cylindrical member having one open end, the open end being insertable over the stud member 32 to thereby create post. The net 16 is attached to the post 18, and the structure is maintained by tensioning ropes 34 extending from a clip 36 adjacent an upper end of each post 18.

FIG 4 illustrates an alternative fixing means in the form of a peg 40 including a disc shaped head 42, lifting handle 44 and attached spike 46.

In use the rules of the game are generally that a team of players should be located on each side of the net 16, the server for each team must serve with the knee and from the service area 12A or 14B. The service commences from the right hand side of each court and is made diagonally to the opponent. A change of serve is indicated when the serve hits the net, goes out of bounds on the full or does not go diagonally across court to opponent.

In general play no hands should be used for touching the ball, and as a typical example, only one bounce of the ball on the ground is allowed per team.

When the ball is in play on one side of the court three touches of the ball for each team can be allowed, after which the ball must be kicked to the opposing side. Once a ball has been served to commence play the service areas 12A and 14A are considered out of bounds.

Points may be scored only when serving, and one point per serve is awarded. The game is won by the first team to score fifteen points with a clear advantage of two points. Further, there should be points between the teams to win the game.

It is preferable if the game is adjudicated by an umpire or referee, and the umpire has the provision of issuing red and yellow cards, a yellow card indicating caution and a red card indicating a sending off court of a player for a minimum of two points. A yellow card can be awarded when a player makes hand contact with the ball and a second hand ball leads to a sending off offence.

Further yellow cards can also be awarded for offences such as questioning decisions of the umpire, ungentlemanly conduct on court and deliberately kicking away the ball.

Obviously these rules are subject to variation, and in particular taking into account skill level of those playing the game the number of bounces allowed per serve, and the number passes between members of the team before the ball is required to cross the net may be varied.

Typically the dimensions of the playing area would be a total length of 8.5 metres including the service area, a width of 6.5 metres and a net height of 975 mm from the top of the net to the ground, with 360 mm clearance from the bottom of the net to the ground. The service area would be approximately 500 mms X 6.5 metres. Again, obviously variations in court dimensions could be made to suit the skill level of the various players taking part.

It is convenient that the invention is provided in the form of a kit comprising the various components of the apparatus, and it is relatively straightforward matter to assembly, simply being a case of laying out the playing area according to the pattern shown in FIG 1, securing the strips forming a playing area using the spikes 26 inserting them through appropriate eyelets 22 and then assembling the net and post arrangement as shown in FIG 2. Thus, for a relatively small outlay an entertaining game can be provided which also requires the participants to accumulate skills which would later be useful on a soccer field.

Modifications and variations of the present invention such as would be applied to a skilled addressee are deemed to be within the scope of the invention. For example, the posts used for supporting the play divider can be made adjustable. This will enable the net to be raised and lowered allowing variation in play or to accommodate different skill levels.

CLAIMS

1. A soccer skill building game to be played by a plurality of players or teams of players, the game being characterised by:
 - a playing area having delineated thereon a divider defining respective playing halves for opposing teams of players, each team being restricted to a respective playing half;
 - each playing half having a respective service area and a respective general play area, whereby in play a soccer ball is served by foot from the service area to the playing area of the opposing player or team, the players being required to maintain the ball in play with the use of feet only by successive passes across the divider with no more than a pre-determined number of ball to ground contacts being allowed.
2. A soccer skill building game according to claim 1, characterised in that a team or player can obtain a score when the ball kicked by the opposing team fails to land in the playing area or, has more than the pre-determined number of ground contacts prior to being returned, or if the opposing player fails to return the ball.
3. A soccer skill building game according to claim 1, wherein each team comprises one, two or three players.
4. An apparatus for playing a soccer skill building game according to any one of claims 1-3, characterised in that the apparatus comprises:
 - a plurality of strip materials arrangeable into a playing area having discrete regions, each region being delineated by one or more strips;
 - means for removably attaching the strips to a playing surface, and a playing divider having means for supporting the divider in an upright position, the playing divider serving to separate the playing area into playing halves.
5. An apparatus according to claim 4, characterised in that the divider is supported by posts located at opposing ends of the divider.

6. An apparatus according to claim 4, characterised in that the divider is supported by posts located at opposing ends thereof, the posts in turn being secured in position in the ground by means of a lowermost spike arrangement.
7. An apparatus according to claim 4, in which the playing divider is used
5 as a base for printed material including advertising material.
8. An apparatus according to claim 6, characterised in that each post is further secured in position by tensioning means extending from a position adjacent an upper end of each post.
9. An apparatus according to claim 8 where the length of the playing area
1 0 is 8.5 metres, each playing half being 4.25 metres in length, the service region occupying one outer 0.5 metre of each playing half.
10. An apparatus according to claim 8 where the width of the playing area is 6.5 metres.
11. An apparatus according to claim 4, characterised in that the means for
1 5 removably attaching the strips to a playing surface comprises a plurality of pegs used to attach the strips to the ground, the pegs passing through apertures formed in the strips at intervals along the length thereof.
12. An apparatus according to claim 11, characterised in that the pegs
2 0 each consist of a disc shaped head and a depending spike, the disc shaped head in use lying flat against the strip material and having on an uppermost surface a handle hinged so as to be moveable between an in-operative condition in which the hand rests in a recess formed in the disc shaped head and an operative condition in which the handle is rotated out of a plane of the disc shaped head.

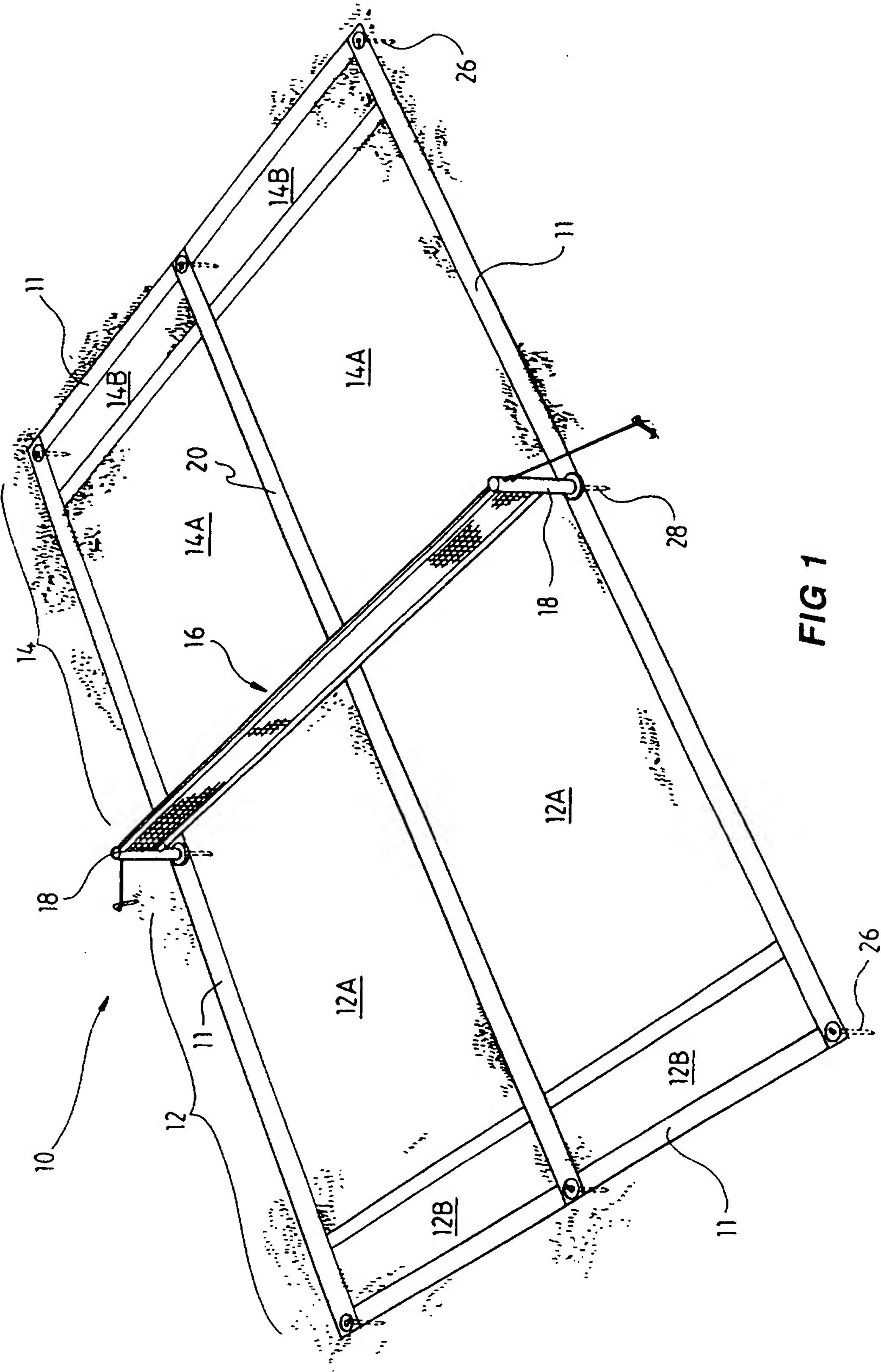


FIG 1

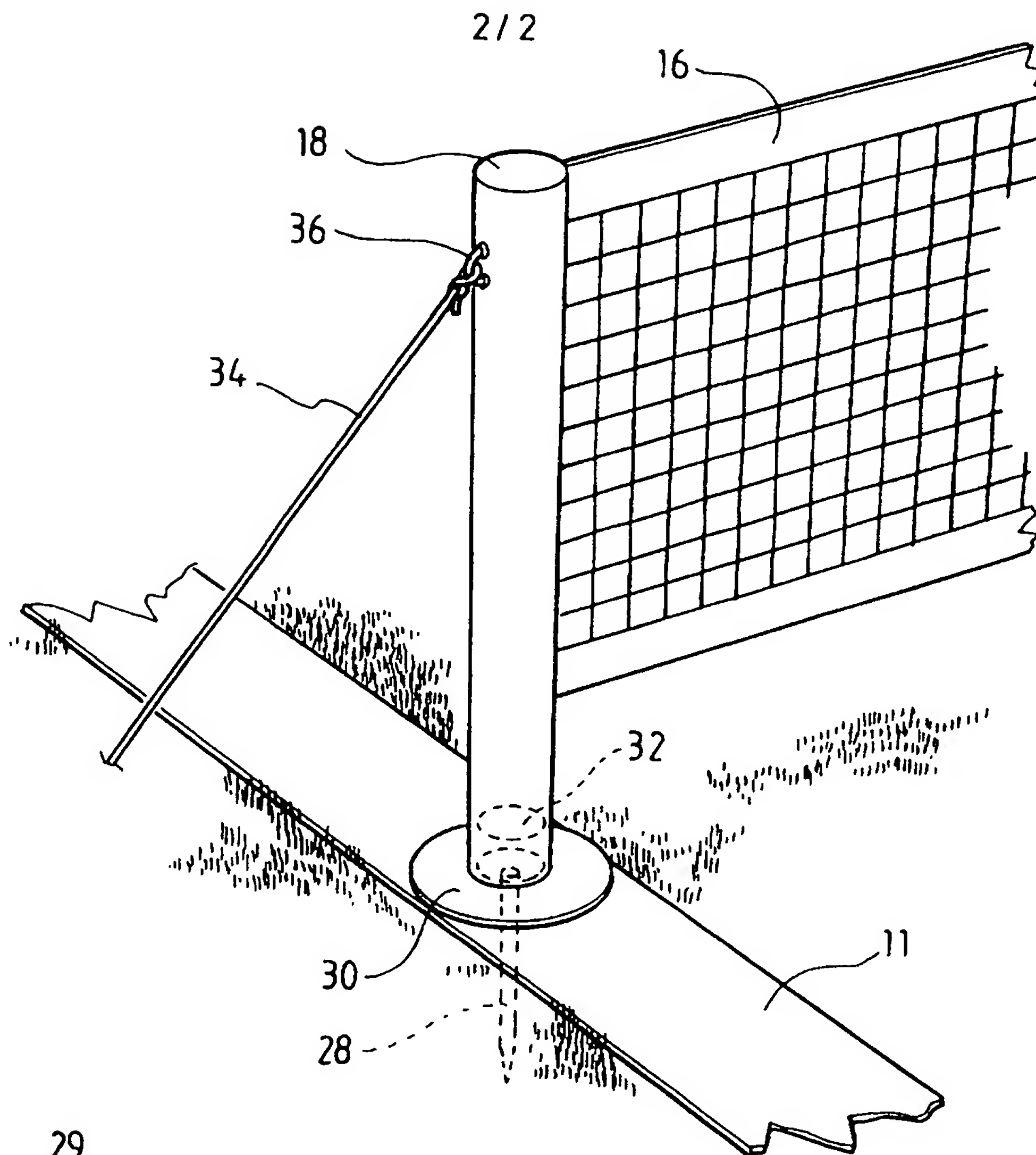


FIG 2

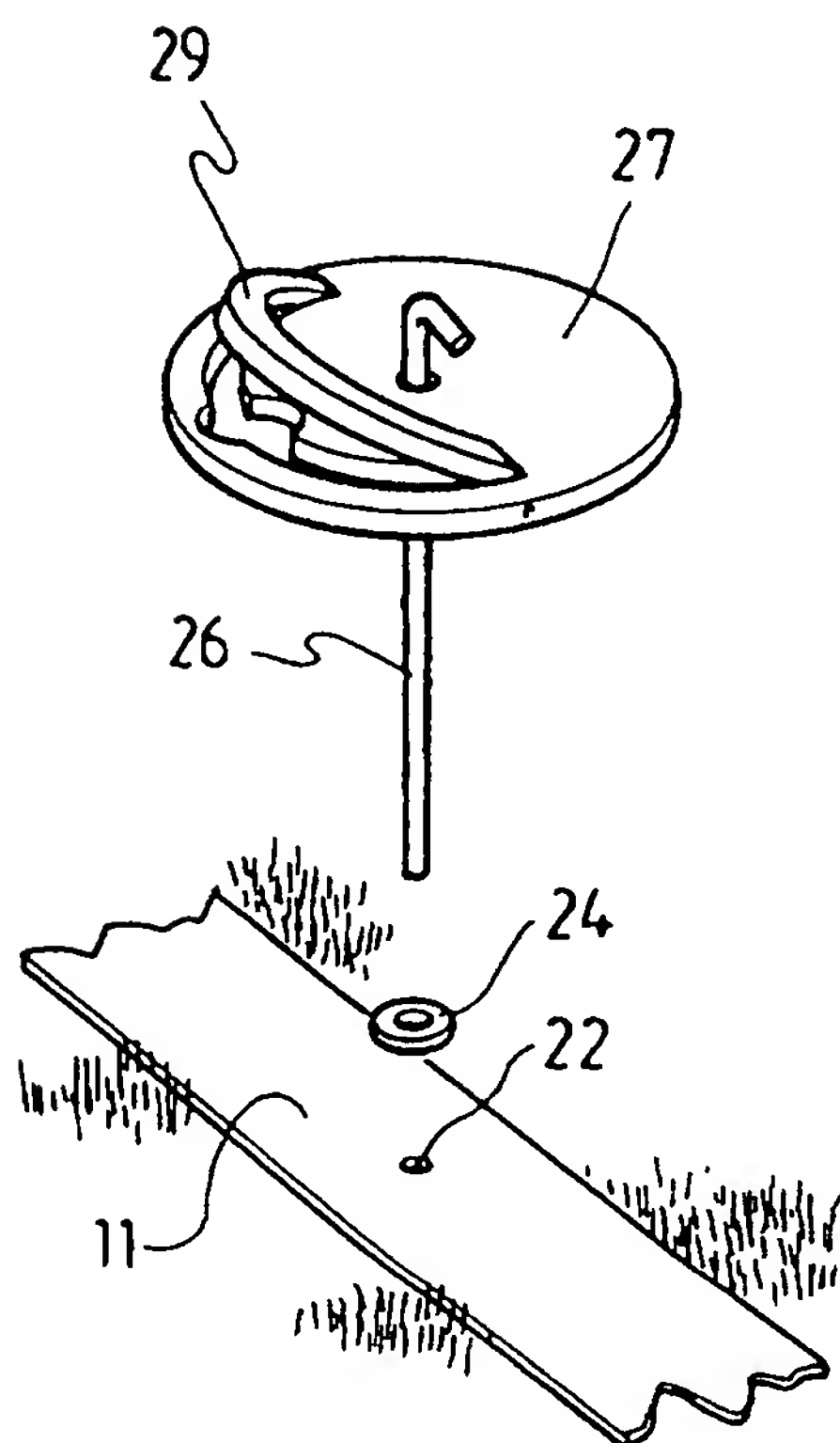


FIG 3

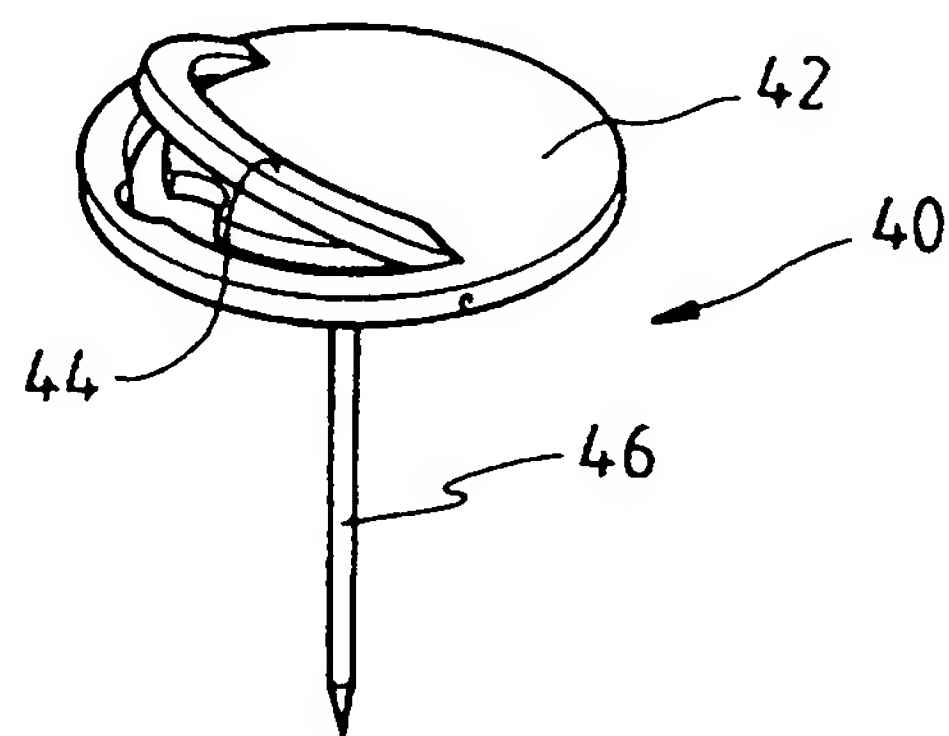


FIG 4

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No.

PCT/AU 97/00391

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTERInt Cl⁶: A63B 69/00, A63C 19/00

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC: A63B 61/00, 61/02, 61/04, 69/00, 71/02; A63C 19/06, 19/08

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

DERWENT

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

| Category* | Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages | Relevant to claim No. |
|-----------|--|-----------------------|
| X | FR, A, 2613951 (DESVALLONS) 15 April 1987 Whole document | 4-6,8,11 |
| X | DE, A, 2635429 (BAYER) 6 August 1976 Whole document | 4-6,8,11 |
| X | US, A, 3980299 (BROWN) 4 August 1975 Whole document | 4-5,11 |



Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C



See patent family annex

* Special categories of cited documents:

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

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later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

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"&"

document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

15 July 1997

Date of mailing of the international search report

21 JUL 1997

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No.

PCT/AU 97/00391

| C (Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT | | |
|--|--|-----------------------|
| Category* | Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages | Relevant to claim No. |
| X | US, A, 4088317 (GIERLA) 7 January 1976 Whole document | 4-5,11 |
| X | US, A, 1897801 (HEALY) 18 May 1932 Whole document | 4-5,11 |
| X | AU, A, 53706/90 (KAITY et al) 20 April 1990 Whole document | 4-5,11 |
| X | DE, A, 2639749 (WINTER) 3 September 1976 Whole document | 4-5 |

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No.

PCT/AU 97/00391

Box I Observations where certain claims were found unsearchable (Continuation of item 1 of first sheet)

This International Search Report has not been established in respect of certain claims under Article 17(2)(a) for the following reasons:

1. ☒ Claims Nos.: 1-3
because they relate to subject matter not required to be searched by this Authority, namely:
playing games as in PCT Rule 39.1(iii)
2. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they relate to parts of the international application that do not comply with the prescribed requirements to such an extent that no meaningful international search can be carried out, specifically:
3. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they are dependent claims and are not drafted in accordance with the second and third sentences of Rule 6.4(a)

Box II Observations where unity of invention is lacking (Continuation of item 2 of first sheet)

This International Searching Authority found multiple inventions in this international application, as follows:

1. ☐ As all required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers all searchable claims
2. ☐ As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying an additional fee, this Authority did not invite payment of any additional fee.
3. ☐ As only some of the required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers only those claims for which fees were paid, specifically claims Nos.:
4. ☐ No required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant. Consequently, this international search report is restricted to the invention first mentioned in the claims; it is covered by claims Nos.:

Remark on Protest

- ☐ The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest.
- ☐ No protest accompanied the payment of additional search fees.